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AUTHOR Macisaac, Doug; Brookhart, Linda
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ABSTRACT

The Teacher Induction Partnerships program was developed by the University of Northern Colorado and several Colorado school districts. The program represents an approach to teacher induction which serves to support beginning and reentry teachers, foster collaborative relationships between the university and school districts, and increase new teacher retention rates. The program provides the opportunity for the beginning and reentry teacher to assume the responsibilities of a regular staff member while receiving support and assistance, feedback on teaching practice, and graduate-level course work in education. The program model includes: (1) legal contracts between all parties stipulating program policies and procedures in addition to personnel roles and responsibilities; (2) a three-person support team for each partner teacher, consisting of a university field consultant, a school-based mentor teacher, and the building principal; (3) orientations for partner teachers, mentor teachers, and principals; (4) graduate seminars for partner teachers; (5) assistance and training for mentor teachers; and (6) release time for partner teachers to observe other teachers and pursue professional growth activities. This paper describes the roles of the partner teacher and each of the team participants and outlines application and placement procedures. (JDD)

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A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO NEW TEACHER INDUCTION

DOUG MACISAAC

LINDA BROOKHART

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
TEACHER EDUCATION CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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INTRODUCTION

The importance of extending support and assistance to new teachers has been well documented and is underscored by the increasing growth of induction programs at the state and local levels. Induction programs are intended to improve teaching performance, promote the personal and professional well-being of new teachers, reduce teacher attrition rates, and transmit the culture of a school system and the profession to new teachers, and facilitate successful entry of novice teachers into the profession (Brooks, 1987; Huling-Austin, 1990). National reports and professional organizations are calling for the design and implementation of induction, internship, or residency programs for beginning teachers that are the shared responsibility of both college-based and school-based teacher educators. This paper describes a university and school partnership approach to teacher induction involving the University of Northern Colorado's Teacher Induction Partnerships (TIP) program and several Colorado school districts. Highlighted are collaborative components of the TIP program which serve to facilitate new teacher induction.

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The University of Northern Colorado's Teacher Induction Partnerships program (hereafter program) represents a university and school partnership approach to teacher induction which serves to support beginning and reentry teachers into the teaching profession, foster collaborative relationships between the university and school districts, and increase new teacher retention rates. Believing that support and assistance is crucial to the success of both beginning and reentry teachers, the program provides a year-long induction experience for new teachers (hereafter Partner Teachers) that combines teaching experience with graduate study in teacher education. The program provides the opportunity for the beginning and reentry teacher to assume the responsibilities of a regular staff member while receiving support and assistance, feedback on teaching practice, and graduate level course work in education. Ensuring the success of this partnership in teacher induction is the shared responsibility of both program and school district personnel. The program supports the ongoing professional growth of Partner Teachers through consultation, field supervision, and continued course work in teacher education. School districts provide a supportive setting for the practice of teaching involving a mentoring component.

Program components, organizational design, and curriculum content are based on literature and research related to induction, mentoring, and teaching, as well as ongoing program feedback from participants identifying needs and concerns of teachers during the initial years of teaching. The program model includes: (1) legal contracts between all parties stipulating program policies and procedures in addition to personnel roles and responsibilities; (2) a three person support team for each Partner Teacher consisting of a university field consultant, a school-based Mentor Teacher, and the building principal; (3) orientations for Partner Teachers, Mentor Teachers, and principals; (4) graduate seminars for Partner Teachers; (5) assistance and training for Mentor Teachers; and (6) release time for Partner Teachers to observe other teachers, and pursue professional growth activities.

UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

The program forms partnerships with Colorado schools districts to provide a year-long teaching assignment for Partner Teachers. Participating districts range in student population size from 1,000 to 29,000 and are culturally and ethnically diverse. School districts participate in the program because they are committed to providing new

teachers with support and assistance during their first year of teaching. Districts benefit from greater flexibility in staffing, reduced class sizes, promoting a model of collegiality and mentoring among teachers, providing professional growth opportunities for experienced teachers, and retaining a greater number of qualified teachers. Partner Teachers benefit from participating in a program that provides them with the opportunity to assume teaching responsibilities within a context of support and assistance involving an academic component which results in credits applicable to a Master of Arts degree. The College of Education benefits by increasing its pool of talent and expertise through collaborating with school-based teacher educators in a program that successfully prepares teachers for the world of practice.

Each district has a designated contact person who is responsible for negotiating legal contracts and monitoring the quality of placement sites within each district. Within the school, the support team for the partner teacher consists of three individuals: the principal, the mentor teacher, and the university field consultant. What follows is a description of this support team beginning with the university field consultant.

THE FIELD CONSULTANT

Each Partner Teacher is assigned a university Field Consultant whose role is to provide teaching support and assistance to the partner teacher and serve as a resource to the mentor teacher. A schedule of visits are established and maintained by the Field Consultant for each Partner Teacher, Mentor Teacher, and principal. The Field Consultant observes and conferences with the Partner Teacher providing specific feedback on teaching as well as offering suggestions for the improvement of practice, assists the Partner Teacher in constructing a Professional Development Plan (PDP), and conducts a formative mid-year assessment and an end of the year written evaluation of the Partner Teacher.

Field Consultants facilitate the Partner Teacher seminar which meets twice a month during the school year in various geographical locations at or near the site of Partner Teacher placements. As seminar leaders, Field Consultants assist Partner Teachers in applying theory and content to their particular teaching situation, facilitate conversations about teaching practice, and provide guidance and support for Partner Teacher research, curriculum, and teaching portfolio projects.

In addition to their work with Partner Teachers, Field Consultants meet regularly with Mentor Teachers as resource consultants. Field Consultants serve as liaisons between the program and participating schools and are instrumental in maintaining open communication among program participants and ensuring that program related concerns are addressed in an adequate and timely manner. In addition, Field Consultants support one another through bi-weekly Teacher Education Center and Center for Teacher Induction meetings, staff development activities and the sharing of case studies on teaching and mentoring.

THE PRINCIPAL

The principal is responsible for Partner Teacher selection and classroom placement, Mentor Teacher selection, and for monitoring the program at the school site to ensure a successful induction experience for the Partner Teacher. Principals provide support and assistance to Partner Teachers in a variety of ways. All principals provide Partner Teachers with a general orientation which provides information regarding district and school level operational policies and procedures, resource materials, supplies, special services, and community related activities. Principals arrange frequent visits to Partner Teachers' classrooms to observe and

provide constructive feedback and offer helpful suggestions about teaching practice. Many principals provide the Partner Teacher and Mentor Teacher with release time from teaching so that may observe each other's teaching, observe in other teachers' classrooms, conference with one another, and pursue professional development activities. Principals also sponsor Partner Teachers in the district assessment model including classroom observations and written teaching evaluations for Partner Teachers, and assist Partner Teachers whenever possible in obtaining a permanent teaching position.

THE MENTOR TEACHER

Each Partner Teacher is paired with an experienced teacher who is selected by the principal to serve as a Mentor Teacher. The Mentor Teacher is is considered to be a successful teacher and a teacher capable of assisting a beginning educator. Criteria for selecting Mentor Teachers derives from the literature on mentoring the beginning teacher. For example, most mentors share a common planning period with their Partner Teacher, are in close proximity to their Partner Teacher's classroom, and are teaching at the same grade level or are teaching the same subject matter as their Partner Teacher.

The mentoring component is based on the belief that assistance is more effective than evaluation when working with new teachers. The Mentor Teacher and Partner Teacher relationship is meant to be collegial and therefore, Mentor Teachers assume a supportive rather than evaluative role. Structured observations and feedback sessions are essential in assisting the novice teacher grow in her or his understanding and skill in the practice of teaching. Therefore, Mentor Teachers are encouraged by the program to observe the Partner Teacher in the classroom and offer suggestions and feedback. Mentor Teachers, however, do not write formal evaluations but instead engage in formative assessment or what Oliva (1989) refers to as nonevaluative supervision and Zimpher and Grossman (1992) define as, "helping teachers improve instruction through giving feedback from classroom observation--a form of consultative or formative review" (p. 143). Free from the responsibility of formal evaluation, the Mentor Teacher has the opportunity to establish a helping relationship with the Partner Teacher; a relationship in which the Partner Teacher is more likely to seek out and ask for support and assistance.

Mentor Teachers are provided orientation materials and suggested activities for working with the new teacher. Mentors provide help to Partner Teachers by sharing materials and resources; acting as a sounding

board for ideas and concerns; assisting the Partner Teacher in becoming familiar with the social context of the school and community; and facilitating positive and open communication between the Partner Teacher, school staff, administration, parents and students. To help Mentor Teachers acquire the skills they need to be effective in their role, the program offers without cost a course on mentoring. The course covers teacher development, observation and conferencing skills, relationship and rapport building skills, mentoring models, and the development and analysis of mentor case studies.

THE PARTNER TEACHER

It is important to understand that the induction year is not an extension of student teaching nor is it equivalent to an internship. Partner Teachers are certified teachers and while there is a support system in place, it is expected that Partner Teachers are capable of functioning independently in the classroom.

Application and Placement Procedures

To be eligible for program participation, candidates must possess a current Colorado teaching certificate, satisfy the requirements for acceptance into UNC's Graduate School, and successfully complete

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interviews at both the university and district level. After candidates are screened and interviewed by program staff, their application packets are forwarded to participating districts for consideration. Principals review applications and contact the candidate or candidates they wish to interview. Ultimately, the decision regarding a Partner Teacher placement is the responsibility of the building principal.

Professional Development

Partner teachers earn ten semester hours of graduate credit while participating in the induction program. The credit earned results from a combination of course work for seminars and classroom teaching and may be applied toward the elementary, middle school, or reading Master of Arts programs. Seminars consist of both academic content and Partner Teacher generated discussion. Seminars focus on current educational issues, trends, and practices. Seminars are also a time for Partner Teachers to share teaching successes and concerns with one another and generate strategies for resolving problems of practice. In this manner, the seminars serve to promote professional collegiality among peers. District procedures and philosophies are incorporated into the seminars and school district staff often co-teach seminars with the Field

consultant. In addition to fulfilling seminar requirements, Partner Teachers consytruct a Professional Development Plan and complete either a teaching portfolio, classroom action research project, or curriculum project which is presented to peers during the Spring Partner Teacher Conference.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The State of Colorado has mandated that school districts provide induction support for new teachers beginning July of 1994. As districts begin to design and implement induction programs there will be an increasing opportunity for college-based and school-based teacher educators to work together in creating a system of support for new teachers as they begin their journey from novice teacher to experienced professional. The University of Northern Colorado's Teacher Induction Partnerships program represents a university and school collaboration for the purpose of teacher induction which brings together theory and practice and crosses the bridge between university teacher preparation and professional teacher practice.

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For further information please contact

The Center for Teacher Induction

286 Mckee Hall
University of Northern Colorado
Greeley, CO 80639

1-800-235-8355